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J. B. B. Nichols

[Parodies of Swinburne]

Oxford, 1881

By Swinburne

THE
HEPTALOGIA

LONDON : PRINTED BY
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SPECIMENS OF MODERN POETS

THE HEPTALOGIA

OR

THE SEVEN AGAINST SENSE

A CAP WITH SEVEN BELLS

- I. THE HIGHER PANTHEISM IN A NUTSHELL
- II. JOHN JONES
- III. THE POET AND THE WOODLOUSE
- IV. THE PERSON OF THE HOUSE (IDYL CCCLXVI)
- V. LAST WORDS OF A SEVENTH-RATE POET
- VI. SONNET FOR A PICTURE
- VII. NEPHELIDIA

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1880

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THE HIGHER PANTHEISM
IN A NUTSHELL

THE HIGHER PANTHEISM
IN A NUTSHELL.

ONE, who is not, we see : but one, whom we see not, is :
Surely this is not that : but that is assuredly this.

What, and wherefore, and whence ? for under is over
and under :

If thunder could be without lightning, lightning could be
without thunder.

Doubt is faith in the main : but faith, on the whole, is
doubt :

We cannot believe by proof : but could we believe with-
out ?

Why, and whither, and how? for barley and rye are not
clover :

Neither are straight lines curves : yet over is under and
over.

Two and two may be four : but four and four are not
eight :

Fate and God may be twain : but God is the same thing
as fate.

Ask a man what he thinks, and get from a man what he
feels :

God, once caught in the fact, shews you a fair pair of
heels.

Body and spirit are twins : God only knows which is
which :

The soul squats down in the flesh, like a tinker drunk in
a ditch.

One and two are not one : but one and nothing is two :
Truth can hardly be false, if falsehood cannot be true.

Once the mastodon was : pterodactyls were common as
cocks :

Then the mammoth was God : now is He a prize ox.

Parallels all things are : yet many of these are askew :
You are certainly I : but certainly I am not you.

Springs the rock from the plain, shoots the stream from
the rock :

Cocks exist for the hen : but hens exist for the cock.

God, whom we see not, is : and God, who is not, we see :
Fiddle, we know, is diddle : and diddle, we take it, is
dee.

JOHN JONES

JOHN JONES.

I.

AT THE PIANO.

I.

LOVE me and leave me ; what love bids retrieve me ? can

June's fist grasp May ?

Leave me and love me ; hopes eyed once above me

like spring's sprouts, decay ;

Fall as the snow falls, when summer leaves grow false—

cards packed for storm's play !

II.

Nay, say Decay's self be but last May's elf, wing shifted,
eye sheathed—

Changeling in April's crib rocked, who lets 'scape rills
locked fast since frost breathed—

Skin cast (think !) adder-like, now bloom bursts bladder-
like,—bloom frost bequeathed ?

III.

Ah, how can fear sit and hear as love hears it grief's
heart's cracked grate's screech ?

Chance lets the gate sway that opens on hate's way and
shews on shame's beach

Crouched like an imp sly change watch sweet love's
shrimps lie, a toothful in each.

IV.

Time feels his tooth slip on husks wet from Truth's lip,
which drops them and grins—
Shells where no throb stirs of life left in lobsters since
joy thrilled their fins—
Hues of the prawn's tail or comb that makes dawn stale,¹
so red for our sins !

V.

Years blind and deaf use the soul's joys as refuse, heart's
peace as manure,
Reared whence, next June's rose shall bloom where our
moons rose last year, just as pure :
Moons' ends match roses' ends: men by beasts' noses'
ends mete sin's stink's cure.

¹ ' Whose youth and freshness
Wrinkles Apollo's, and makes stale the morning.'—SHAKESPEARE.

VI.

Leaves love last year smelt now feel dead love's tears

melt—flies caught in time's mesh !

Salt are the dews in which new time breeds new sin, brews

blood and stews flesh ;

Next year may see dead more germs than this weeded

and reared them afresh.

VII.

Old times left perish, there's new time to cherish ; life

just shifts its tune ;

As, when the day dies, earth, half afraid, eyes the growth

of the moon ;

Love me and save me, take me or waive me ; death

takes one so soon !

II.

BY THE CLIFF.

I.

Is it daytime (guess),

You that feed my soul

To excess

With that light in those eyes

And those curls drawn like a scroll

In that round grave guise ?

No or yes ?

II.

Oh, the end, I'd say !

Such a foolish thing

(Pure girls' play !)

As a mere mute heart,

Was it worth a kiss, a ring,

This ? for two must part—

Not to-day.

III.

Look, the whole sand crawls,

Hums, a heaving hive,

Scrapes and scrawls—

Such a buzz and burst !

Here just one thing's not alive,

One that was at first—

But life palls.

IV.

Yes, my heart, I know,

Just my heart's stone dead—

Yes, just so.

Sick with heat, those worms

Drop down scorched and overfed—

No more need of germs !

Let them go.

V.

Yes, but you now, look,

You, the rouged stage female

With a crook,

Chalked Arcadian sham,

You that made my soul's sleep's dream ail—

Your soul fit to damn ?

Shut the book.

III.

ON THE SANDS.

I.

THERE was nothing at all in the case (conceive)

But love ; being love, it was not (understand)

Such a thing as the years let fall (believe)

Like the rope's coil dropt from a fisherman's hand

When the boat's hauled up—'by your leave !'

II.

So—well ! How that crab writhes—leg after leg

Drawn, as a worm draws ring upon ring

Gradually, not gladly ! Nay, but, Meg,

Is it more than the ransom (say) of a king
(Take my meaning at least) that I beg?

III.

Not so ! You were ready to learn, I think,

What the world said ! ‘He loves you too well
(suppose)

For such leanings ! These poets, their love’s mere ink—

Like a flower, their flame flashes—a rosebud, blows—
Then it all drops down at a wink !

IV.

‘ Ah, the instance ! A curl of a blossomless vine

The vinedresser passing it sickens to see
And mutters “ Much hope (under God) of His wine

From the branch and the bark of a barren tree
Spring reared not, and winter lets pine—

v.

“ His wine that should glorify (saith He) the cup
That a man beholding (not tasting) might say
‘ Pour out life at a draught, drain it dry, drink it up,
Give this one thing, and huddle the rest away—
Save the bitch, and who cares for the pup?’

vi.

“ Let it rot then !” which saying, he leaves it—we’ll
guess,
Feels (if the sap move at all) thus much—
Yearns, and would blossom, would quicken no less,
Bud at an eye’s glance, flower at a touch—
“ Die, perhaps, would you not, for her? —“ Yes

VII.

‘Note the hitch there ! That’s piteous—so much being
done,

(He’ll think some day, your lover) so little to do !

Such infinite days to wear out, once begun !

Since the hand its glove holds, and the footsole its shoe—
Overhead too there’s always the sun !’

VIII.

Oh, no doubt they had said so, your friends—been
profuse

Of good counsel, wise hints—‘where the trap lurks,
walk warily—

Squeeze the fruit to the core ere you count on the juice !

For the graft may fail, shift, wax, change colour, wane,
vary, lie—’

You were cautious, God knows—to what use ?

IX.

This crab's wiser, it strikes me—no twist but implies
life—

Not a curl but's so fit you could find none fitter—
For the brute from its brutehood looks up thus and eyes
life—

Stoop your soul down and listen, you'll hear it twitter,
Laughing lightly,—my crab's life's the wise life !

X.

Ah, now, look you—tail foremost, the beast sets sea-
ward—

The sea draws it, sand sucks it—he's wise, my crab !
From the napkin out jumps his one talent—good
steward,

Just judge ! So a man shirks the smile or the stab,
And sets his sail duly to leeward !

XI.

Trust me ? Hardly ! I bid you not lean (remark)

On my spirit, your spirit—my flesh, your flesh—

Hold my hand, and tread safe through the horrible
dark—

Quench my soul as with sprinklings of snow, then
refresh

With some blast of new bellows the spark !

XII.

By no means ! This were easy (men tell me) to say—

‘Give her all, throw your chance up, fall back on her
heart !’

(Say my friends) ‘she must change ! after night follows
day—’

No such fool ! I am safe set in hell, for my part—

So let heaven do the worst now he may !

XIII.

What they bid me? Well, this, nothing more—‘Tell
her this—

“You are mine, I yours, though the whole world fail—
Though things are not, I know there is one thing which
is—

Though the oars break, there’s hope for us yet—hoist
the sail !

Oh, your heart ! what’s the heart ? but your kiss !”

XIV.

‘Then she breaks, she drops down, she lies flat at your
feet—

Take her then !’ Well, I knew it—what fools are men !
Take the bee by her horns, will your honey prove sweet ?

Sweet is grass—will you pasture your cows in a fen ?

Oh, if contraries could but once meet !

xv.

Love you call it? Some twitch in the moon's face
(observe)

Wet blink of her eyelid, tear dropt about dewfall,
Cheek flushed or obscured—does it make the sky
swerve?

Fetch the test, work the question to rags, bring to
proof all—

Find what souls want and bodies deserve !

xvi.

Ah, we know you ! Your soul works to infinite ends,
Frets, uses life up for death's sake, takes pains,
Flings down love's self—'but you, bear me witness, my
friends !

Have I lost spring? count up (see) the winter's fresh
gains !

Is the shrub spoilt? the pine's hair impends !'

XVII.

What, you'd say—'Mark how God works ! Years crowd,
time wears thin,
Earth keeps good yet, the sun goes on, stars hold
their own,
And you'll change, climb past sight of the world, shift
your skin,
Never heeding how life moans—"more flesh now,
less bone !"
For that cheek's worn waste outline (death's grin)

XVIII.

Pleads with time still—"what good if I lose this? but
see—"
(There's the crab gone !) "I said, 'Though earth
sinks,'"' (you perceive?

Ah, true, back there !) your soul now—“‘yet some
vein might be

(Could one find it alive in the heart's core's pulse,
cleave

Through the life-springs where 'you' melts in 'me)—

XIX.

“‘Some true vein of the absolute soul, which sur-
vives

All that flesh runs to waste through'—and lo, this
fails !

Here's death close on us ! One life ? a million of
lives !

Why choose one sail to watch of these infinite
sails ?

Time's a tennis-play ? thank you, no, fives !

XX.

“Stop life’s ball then !” Such folly ! melt earth down
for that,

Till the pure ore eludes you and leaves you raw
scoriæ ?

Pish, the vein’s wrong !’ But you, friends—come, what
were you at

When God spat you out suddenly ? what was the
story He

Cut short thus, the growth He laid flat ?

XXI.

Wait ! the crab’s twice alive, mark ! Oh, worthy, your
soul,

Of strange ends, great results, novel labours ! Take
note,

I reject this for one ! (ay, now, straight to the hole !

Safe in sand there—your skirts smooth out all as they
float !)

I, shirk drinking through flaws in the bowl ?

XXII.

Or suppose now that rock's cleft—grim, scored to the
quick,

As a man's face kept fighting all life through gets
scored,

Mossed and marked with grey purulent leprosy,
sick,

Flat and foul as man's life here (be swift with your
sword—

Cut the soul out, stuck fast where thorns prick !)

XXIII.

— Say it let the rock's heart out, its meaning, the thing
All was made for, devised, ruled out gradually,
planned—

Ah, that sea-shell, perhaps—since it lies, such a ring
Of pure colour, a cup full of sunbeams, to stand
(Say, in Lent) at the priest's hand—(no king !)

XXIV.

Blame the cleft then? Praise rather! So—just a
chance gone!

Had you said—'Save the seed and secure souls in
flower'—

Ah, how time laughs, years palpitate, pro grapples con,
Till one day you shrug shoulders—'Well, gone, the
good hour!

Till one night—'Is God off now? or on?

IV.

UP THE SPOUT.

I.

Hi ! Just you drop that ! Stop, I say !

Shirk work, think slink off, twist friend's wrist ?

Where that spined sand's lined band's the bay—

Lined blind with true sea's blue, as due—

Promising—not to pay ?

II.

For the sea's debt leaves wet the sand ;

Burst worst fate's weights in one burst gun ?

A man's own yacht, blown—What ? off land ?

Tack back, or veer round here, then—queer !

Reef points, though—understand ?

III.

I'm blest if I do. Sigh ? be blowed !

Love's doves make break life's ropes, eh ? Tropes !

Faith's brig, baulked, sides caulked, rides at road ;

Hope's gropes befogged, storm-dogged and bogged—

Clogged, water-logged, her load !

IV.

Stowed, by Jove, right and tight, away !

No show now how best plough sea's brow,

Wrinkling—breeze quick, tease thick, ere day,

Clear sheer wave's sheen of green, I mean,
With twinkling wrinkles—eh ?

Sea sprinkles winkles, tinkles light
Shells' bells—boy's joys that hap to snap !
It's just sea's fun, breeze done, to spite
God's rods that scourge her surge, I'd urge—
Not proper, is it—quite ?

VI.

See, fore and aft, life's craft undone !
Crank plank, split spritsail—mark, sea's lark !
That grey cold sea's old sprees, begun
When men lay dark i' the ark, no spark,
All water—just God's fun !

VII.

Not bright, at best, his jest to these

Seemed—screamed, shrieked, wreaked on kin for sin !

When for mirth's yell earth's knell seemed please

Some dumb new grim great whim in him

Made Jews take chalk for cheese.

VIII.

Could God's rods bruise God's Jews ? Their jowls

Bobbed, sobbed, gaped, aped the plaice in face :

None heard, 'tis odds, his—God's—folk's howls.

Now, how must I apply, to try

This hookiest-beaked of owls ?

IX.

Well, I suppose God knows—I don't.

Time's crimes mark dark men's types, in stripes

Broad as fen's lands men's hands were wont

Leave grieve unploughed, though proud and loud

With birds' words—No ! he won't !

x.

One never should think good impossible.

Eh ? say I'd hide this Jew's oil's cruse—

His shop might hold bright gold, engrossible

By spy—spring's air takes there no care

To wave the heath-flower's glossy bell !

xi.

But gold bells chime in time there, coined—

Gold ! Old Sphinx winks there—'Read my screed !'

Doctrine Jews learn, use, burn for, joined

(Through new craft's stealth) with health and wealth—

At once all three purloined !

XII.

I rose with dawn, to pawn, no doubt,

(Miss this chance, glance untried aside ?)

John's shirt, my—no ! Ay, so—the lout !

Let yet the door gape, store on floor

And not a soul about ?

XIII.

Such men lay traps, perhaps—and I'm

Weak—meek—mild—child of woe, you know !

But theft, I doubt, my lout calls crime.

Shrink ? Think ! Love's dawn in pawn—you spawn

Of Jewry ! Just in time !

V.

OFF THE PIER.

I.

ONE last glance at these sands and stones !

Time goes past men, and lives to his liking,
Steals, and ruins, and sometimes atones.

Why should he be king, though, and why not I king ?
There now, that wind, like a swarm of sick drones !

II.

Is it heaven or mere earth (come !) that moves so and
moans ?

Oh, I knew, when you loved me, my soul was in
flowerage—

Now the frost comes ; from prime, though, I watched
through to nones,

Read love's litanies over—his age was not our
age !

No more flutes in this world for me now, dear !
trombones.

III.

All that youth once denied and made mouths at, ag
owns.

Facts put fangs out and bite us ; life stings and grows
viperous ;

And time's fugues are a hubbub of meaningless tones.

Once we followed the piper ; now why not the piper
us ?

Love, grown grey, plays mere solos ; we want anti-
phones.

IV.

And we sharpen our wits up with passions for hones,
Melt down loadstars for magnets, use women for
whetstones,
Learn to bear with dead calms by remembering
cyclones,
Snap strings short with sharp thumbnails, till silence
begets tones,
Burn our souls out, shift spirits, turn skins and change
zones ;

V.

Then the heart, when all's done with, wakes, whimpers,
intones
Some lost fragment of tune it thought sweet ere it
grew sick ;
(Is it life that disclaims this, or death that disowns ?)

Mere dead metal, scrawled bars—ah, one touch, you
make music !

Love's worth saving, youth doubts, but experience
depones.

VI.

Think, what use, when youth's saddle galls bay's back
or roan's,

To seek chords on love's keys to strike, other than
his chords ?

There's an error joy winks at and grief half condones,

Or life's counterpoint grates the C major of discords—

'Tis man's choice 'twixt sluts rose-crowned and queens
age dethrones.

VII.

I for instance might groan as a bag-pipe groans,

Give the flesh of my heart for sharp sorrows to
flagellate,

Grief might grind my cheeks down, age make sticks of
my bones,

(Though a queen drowned in tears must be worth
more than Madge elate)¹

Rose might turn burdock, and pine-apples cones ;

VIII.

My skin might change to a pitiful crone's,

My lips to a lizard's, my hair to weed,

My features, in fact, to a series of loans ;

Thus much is conceded ; now, you, concede

You would hardly salute me by choice, John Jones ?

¹ First edition :—

And my face bear his brand—mine, that once bore Love's badge
elate !

THE POET AND THE WOODLOUSE

THE POET AND THE WOODLOUSE.

SAID a poet to a woodlouse—‘Thou art certainly my
brother ;

I discern in thee the markings of the fingers of the
Whole ;

And I recognize, in spite of all the terrene smut and
smother,

In the colours shaded off thee, the suggestions of a
soul.

44 *THE POET AND THE WOODLOUSE.*

‘Yea,’ the poet said, ‘I smell thee by some passive
divination,

I am satisfied with insight of the measure of thine
house ;

What had happened I conjecture, in a blank and
rhythmic passion,

Had the æons thought of making thee a man, and me
a louse.

‘The broad lives of upper planets, their absorption and
digestion,

Food and famine, health and sickness, I can scrutinize
and test ;

Through a shiver of the senses comes a resonance of
question,

And by proof of balanced answer I decide that I am
best.

‘Man, the fleshly marvel, always feels a certain kind of
awe stick

To the skirts of contemplation, cramped with nymphoto-
leptic weight :

Feels his faint sense charred and branded by the touch
of solar caustic,

On the forehead of his spirit feels the footprint of a
Fate.’

‘Notwithstanding which, O poet,’ spake the woodlouse,
very blandly,

‘I am likewise the created,—I the equipoise of
thee ;

I the particle, the atom, I behold on either hand
lie

The inane of measured ages that were embryos
of me.

46 *THE POET AND THE WOODLOUSE.*

'I am fed with intimations, I am clothed with consequences,

And the air I breathe is coloured with apocalyptic blush :

Ripest-budded odours blossom out of dim chaotic stenchs,

And the Soul plants spirit-lilies in sick leagues of human slush.

'I am thrilled half cosmically through by cryptophantic surgings,

Till the rhythmic hills roar silent through a spongy kind of blee :

And earth's soul yawns disembowelled of her pancreatic organs,

Like a madreporic if mesmerized, in rapt catalepsy.

‘ And I sacrifice, a Levite—and I palpitate, a poet ;—

Can I close dead ears against the rush and resonance
of things ?

Symbols in me breathe and flicker up the heights of the
heroic ;

Earth’s worst spawn, you said, and cursed me ? look !
approve me ! I have wings.

‘ Ah, men’s poets ! men’s conventions crust you round
and swathe you mist-like,

And the world’s wheels grind your spirits down the
dust ye overtrod :

We stand sinlessly stark-naked in effulgence of the
Christlight,

And our polecat chokes not cherubs ; and our skunk
smells sweet to God.

48 *THE POET AND THE WOODLOUSE.*

‘For He grasps the pale Created by some thousand vital
handles,

Till a Godshine, bluely winnowed through the sieve of
thunderstorms,

Shimmers up the non-existent round the churning feet
of angels ;

And the atoms of that glory may be seraphs, being
worms.

‘Friends, your nature underlies us and your pulses
overplay us ;

Ye, with social sores unbandaged, can ye sing right
and steer wrong ?

For the transient cosmic, rooted in imperishable chaos,
Must be kneaded into drastics as material for a
song.

‘Eyes once purged from homebred vapours through
humanitarian passion

See that monochrome a despot through a democratic
prism ;

Hands that rip the soul up, reeking from divine eviscera-
tion,

Not with priestlike oil anoint him, but a stronger-
smelling chrism.

‘Pass, O poet, retransfigured ! God, the psychometric
rhapsode,

Fills with fiery rhythms the silence, stings the dark
with stars that blink ;

All eternities hang round him like an old man’s clothes
collapsèd,

While he makes his mundane music—AND HE WILL
NOT STOP, I THINK.’

THE PERSON OF THE HOUSE

THE PERSON OF THE HOUSE.

IDYL CCCLXVI.

THE ACCOMPANIMENTS.

1. THE MONTHLY NURSE.
2. THE CAUDLE.
3. THE SENTENCES.

THE KID.

1. THE MONTHLY NURSE.

THE sickly airs had died of damp ;

Through huddling leaves the holy chime

Flagged ; I, expecting Mrs. Gamp,

Thought—‘ Will the woman come in time ? ’

Upstairs I knew the matron bed

Held her whose name confirms all joy

To me ; and tremblingly I said

‘ Ah ! will it be a girl or boy ? ’

And, soothed, my fluttering doubts began

To sift the pleasantness of things ;

Developing the unshapen man,

An eagle baffled of his wings ;

Considering, next, how fair the state

And large the license that sublimes

A nineteenth-century female fate—

Sweet cause that thralls my liberal rhymes !

And Chastities and colder Shames,

Decorums mute and marvellous,

And fair Behaviour that reclaims

All fancies grown erroneous,

Moved round me musing, till my choice

Faltered. A female in a wig
Stood by me, and a drouthy voice
Announced her—Mrs. Betsy Prig.

2. THE CAUDLE.

Sweet Love that sways the reeling years,
The crown and chief of certitudes,
For whose calm eyes and modest ears
Time writes the rule and text of prudes—
That, surpliced, stoops a nuptial head
Nor chooses to live blindly free,
But, with all pulses quieted,
Plays tunes of domesticity—
That Love I sing of and have sung
And mean to sing till Death yawn sheer,
He rules the music of my tongue,
Stills it or quickens there or here.

I say but this : as we went up

I heard the Monthly give a sniff

And ‘*if* the big dog makes the pup—’

She murmured—then repeated ‘*if*!’

The caudle on a slab was placed ;

She snuffed it, snorting loud and long ;

I fled—I would not stop to taste—

And dreamed all night of things gone wrong.

3. THE SENTENCES.

I.

Abortive Love is half a sin ;

But Love’s abortions dearer far

Than wheels without an axle-pin

Or life without a married star.

II.

My rules are hard to understand

For him whom sensual rules depress ;

A bandbox in a midwife's hand

May hold a costlier bridal dress.

III.

‘ I like her not ; in fact I loathe ;

Bugs hath she brought from London beds.’

Friend ! wouldst thou rather bear their growth

Or have a baby with two heads ?

IDYL CCCLXVI.

THE KID.

My spirit, in the doorway's pause,
Fluttered with fancies in my breast ;
Obsequious to all decent laws,
I felt exceedingly distressed.
I knew it rude to enter there
With Mrs. V. in such a state ;
And, 'neath a magisterial air,
Felt actually indelicate.
I knew the nurse began to grin ;
I turned to greet my Love. Said she—
' Confound your modesty, come in !
—What shall we call the darling, V. ? '

(There are so many charming names !

Girls'—Peg, Moll, Doll, Fan, Kate, Blanche, Bab :

Boys'—Mahershahal-hashbaz, James,

Kit, Nick, Dick, Mark, Aminadab.)

Lo, as the acorn to the oak,

As well-heads to the river's height,

As to the chicken the moist yolk,

As to high noon the day's first white—

Such is the baby to the man.

There, straddling one red arm and leg,

Lay my last work, in length a span,

Half hatched, and conscious of the egg.

A creditable child, I hoped ;

And half a score of joys to be

Through sunny lengths of prospect sloped

Smooth to the bland futurity.

O, fate surpassing other dooms,

O, hope above all wrecks of time !

O, light that fills all vanquished glooms,

O, silent song o'ermastering rhyme !

I covered either little foot,

I drew the strings about its waist ;

Pink as the unshell'd inner fruit,

But barely decent, hardly chaste,

Its nudity had startled me ;

But when the petticoats were on,

' I know,' I said ; ' its name shall be

Paul Cyril Athanasius John.'

' Why,' said my wife, ' the child's a girl.'

My brain swooned, sick with failing sense ;

With all perception in a whirl,

How could I tell the difference ?

' Nay,' smiled the nurse, ' the child's a boy.

And all my soul was soothed to hear

That so it was : then startled Joy
Mocked Sorrow with a doubtful tear.
And I was glad as one who sees
For sensual optics things unmeet :
As purity makes passion freeze,
So faith warns science off her beat.
Blessed are they that have not seen,
And yet, not seeing, have believed :
To walk by faith, as preached the Dean,
And not by sight, have I achieved.
Let love, that does not look, believe ;
Let knowledge, that believes not, look :
Truth pins her trust on falsehood's sleeve,
While reason blunders by the book.
Then Mrs. Prig addressed me thus ;
'Sir, if you'll be advised by me,
You'll leave the blessed babe to us ;
It's my belief he wants his tea.'

LAST WORDS
OF A SEVENTH-RATE POET

LAST WORDS
OF A
SEVENTH-RATE POET.

BILL, I feel far from quite right—if not further : already
the pill

Seems, if I may say so, to bubble inside me. A poet's
heart, Bill,

Is a sort of a thing that is made of the tenderest young
bloom on a fruit.

You may pass me the mixture at once, if you please—
and I'll thank you to boot

For that poem—and then for the julep. This really is
damnable stuff !

(Not the poem, of course.) Do you snivel, old friend ?
well, it's nasty enough,

But I think I can stand it—I think so—ay, Bill, and I
could were it worse.

But I'll tell you a thing that I can't and I won't. 'Tis
the old, old curse—

The gall of the gold-fruited Eden, the lure of the angels
that fell.

'Tis the core of the fruit snake-spotted in the hush of
the shadows of hell,

Where a lost man sits with his head drawn down, and a
weight on his eyes.

You know what I mean, Bill—the tender and delicate
mother of lies,

Woman, the devil's first cousin—no doubt by the female
side.

The breath of her mouth still moves in my hair, and I
know that she lied,

And I feel her, Bill, sir, inside me—she operates there
like a drug.

Were it better to live like a beetle, to wear the cast
clothes of a slug,

Be the louse in the locks of the hangman, the mote in
the eye of the bat,

Than to live and believe in a woman, who must one
day grow aged and fat ?

You must see it's preposterous, Bill, sir. And yet, how
the thought of it clings !

I have lived out my time—I have prigged lots of verse—
I have kissed (ah, that stings !)

Lips that swore I had cribbed every line that I wrote on
them—cribbed—honour bright !

Then I loathed her ; but now I forgive her ; perhaps
after all she was right.

Yet I swear it was shameful—unwomanly, Bill, sir—to
say that I fibbed.

Why, the poems were mine, for I bought them in print.
Cribbed ? of course they were cribbed.

Yet I wouldn't say, cribbed from the French—Lady
Bathsheba thought it was vulgar—

But picked up on the banks of the Don, from the lips of
a highly intelligent Bulgar.

I'm aware, Bill, that's out of all metre—I can't help it—
I'm none of your sort

Who set metres, by Jove, above morals—not exactly.
They don't go to Court—

As I mentioned one night to that cowslip-faced pet,

Lady Rahab Redrabbet

(Whom the Marquis calls Drabby for short). Well, I

say, if you want a thing, grab it—

That's what I did, at least, when I took that *danseuse* to

a swell *cabaret*,

Where expense was no consideration. A poet, you see,

now and then must be gay.

(I declined to give more, I remember, than fifty centeems

to the waiter ;

For I asked him if that was enough ; and the jackanapes

answered—*Peut-être*.

Ah, it isn't in you to draw up a *menu* such as ours was,

though humble :

When I told Lady Shoreditch, she thought it a regular

grand tout ensemble.)

She danced the heart out of my body—I can see in the
glare of the lights,

I can see her again as I saw her that evening, in spangles
and tights.

When I spoke to her first, her eye flashed so, I heard—
as I fancied—the spark whiz

From her eyelid—I said so next day to that jealous old
fool of a Marquis.

She reminded me, Bill, of a lovely volcano, whose entrails
are ava—

Or (you know my *penchant* for original types) of the upas
in Java.

In the curve of her sensitive nose was a singular species
of dimple,

Where the flush was the mark of an angel's creased kiss
—if it wasn't a pimple.

Now I'm none of your bashful John Bulls who don't
know a pilau from a puggaree

Nor a chili, by George, from a chopstick. So, sir, I
marched into her snuggery,

And proposed a light supper by way of a finish. I
treated her, Bill,

To six *entrées* of ortolans, sprats, maraschino, and oysters.

It made her quite ill.

Of which moment of sickness I took some advantage.

I held her like this,

And availed myself, sir, of her sneezing, to shut up her
lips with a kiss.

The waiters, I saw, were quite struck ; and I felt, I may
say, *entre nous*

Like Don Juan, Lauzun, Almaviva, Lord Byron, and
old Richelieu.

(You'll observe, Bill, that rhyme's quite Parisian ; a
Londoner, sir, would have cited old Q.)

These are moments that thrill the whole spirit with
spasms that excite and exalt.

I stood more than the peer of the great Casanova—you
know—de Seingalt.

She was worth, sir, I say it without hesitation, two brace
of her sisters.

Ah, why should all honey turn rhubarb—all cherries
grow onions—all kisses leave blisters ?

Oh, and why should I ask myself questions ? I've heard
such before—once or twice.

Ah, I can't understand it—but, O, I imagine it strikes
me as nice.

There's a deity shapes us our ends, sir, rough-hew them,
my boy, how we will—

As I stated myself in a poem I published last year, you
know, Bill—

Where I mentioned that that was the question—to be,
or, by Jove, not to be.

Ah, it's something—you'll think so hereafter—to wait on
a poet like me.

Had I written no more than those verses on that
Countess I used to call Pussy—

Yes, Minette or Manon—and—you'll hardly believe it—
she said they were all out of Musset.

Now I don't say they weren't—but what then? and I don't
say they were—I'll bet pounds against pennies on

The subject—I wish I may never die Laureate, if some
of them weren't out of Tennyson.

And I think—I don't like to be certain, with Death, so
to speak, by me, frowning—

But I think there were some—say a dozen, perhaps, or
a score—out of Browning.

As for poets who go on a contrary tack to what I go
and you go—

You remember my lyrics *translated*—like ‘sweet bully
Bottom’—from Hugo?

Though I will say it’s curious that simply on just that
account there should be

Men so bold as to say that not one of my poems was
written by me.

It would stir the political bile or the physical spleen of
a drab or a Tory

To hear critics assign to his hand the Confessional, Bill,
and the Laboratory.

Yes, it’s singular—nay, I can’t think of a parallel (ain’t
it a high lark?

As that Countess would say)—there are few men believe

it was I wrote the Ode to a Skylark.

And it often has given myself and Lord Albert no end

of diversion

To hear fellows maintain to my face it was Wordsworth

who wrote the Excursion.

When they know that whole reams of the verses recur in

my authorized works

Here and there, up and down ! Why, such readers are

infidels—heretics—Turks.

And the pitiful critics who think in their paltry presump-

tion to pay me a

Pretty compliment, pairing me off, sir, with Keats—as if

he could write *Lamia* !

While I never produced a more characteristic and

exquisite book,

One that gave me more real satisfaction, than did, on
the whole, Lalla Rookh.

Was it there that I called on all debtors, being pestered
myself by a creditor, (he
Isn't paid yet) to rise, by the proud appellation of bonds-
men—hereditary ?

Yes—I think so. And yet, on my word, I can't think
why I think it was so.

It more probably was in the poem I made a few seasons
ago

On that Duchess—her name now ? ah, thus one outlives
a whole cycle of joys !

Fair supplants black as brown succeeds golden. The
poem made rather a noise.

And indeed I have seen worse verses ; but as for the
woman, my friend—

Though his neck had been never so stiff, she'd have
made a philosopher bend.

As the broken heart of a sunset that bleeds pure purple
and gold

In the shudder and swoon of the sickness of colour, the
agonies old

That engirdle the brows of the day when he sinks with
a spasm into rest

And the splash of his kingly blood is dashed on the
skirts of the west,

Even such was my own, when I felt how much sharper
than any snake's tooth

Was the passion that made me mistake Lady Eve for
her niece Lady Ruth.

The whole world, colourless, lapsed. Earth fled from
my feet like a dream,

And the whirl of the walls of Space was about me, and
moved as a stream

Flowing and ebbing and flowing all night to a weary
tune

(‘Such as that of my verses’? Get out!) in the face of
a sick-souled moon.

The keen stars kindled and faded and fled, and the wind
in my ears

Was the wail of a poet for failure—you needn’t come
snivelling tears

And spoiling the mixture, confound you, with dropping
your tears into that !

I know I’m pathetic—I must be—and you soft-hearted
and fat,

And I’m grateful of course for your kindness—there,
don’t come hugging me, now—

But because a fellow's pathetic, you needn't low like a
cow.

I should like—on my soul, I should like—to remember
—but somehow I can't—

If the lady whose love has reduced me to this was the
niece or the aunt.

But whichever it was, I feel sure, when I published my
lays of last year

(You remember their title—The Tramp—only seven-
and-sixpence—not dear),

I sent her a copy (perhaps her tears fell on the title-page
—yes—

I should like to imagine she wept)—and the Bride of
Bulgaria (MS.)

I forwarded with it. The lyrics, no doubt, she found
bitter—and sweet ;

But the Bride she rejected, you know, with expressions

I will not repeat.

Well—she did no more than all publishers did. Though

my prospects were marred,

I can pity and pardon them. Blindness, mere blind-

ness ! And yet it was hard.

For a poet, Bill, is a blossom—a bird—a billow—a breeze—

A kind of creature that moves among men as a wind

among trees.

I with the heat of my heart still burning against all bars

As the fire of the dawn, so to speak, in the blanched

blank brows of the stars—

I with my tremulous lips made pale by musical

breath—

I with the shade in my eyes that was left by the kisses

of death—

(For Death came near me in youth, and touched my
face with his face,

And put in my lips the songs that belong to a desolate
place—

Desolate truly, my heart and my life, till her kiss filled
them up !)

I with my soul like wine poured out with my flesh for
the cup—

It was hard for me—it was hard—Bill, Bill, you great
owl, was it not ?

For the day creeps in like a Fate : and I think my grand
passion is rot :

And I dreamily seem to perceive, by the light of a life's
dream done,

The lotion at six, and the mixture at ten, and the draught
before one.

Yes—I feel rather better. Man's life is a mull, at the
best ;

And the patent perturbator pills are like bullets of lead
in my chest.

When a man's whole spirit is like the lost Pleiad, a
blown-out star,

Is there comfort in Holloway, Bill? is there hope of
salvation in Parr?

True, most things work to their end—and an end that
the shroud overlaps.

Under lace, under silk, under gold, sir, the skir of
winding-sheet flaps—

Which explains, if you think of it, Bill, why I can't,
though my soul thereon broodeth,*

Quite make out if I loved Lady Tamar as much as
loved Lady Judith.

Yet her dress was of violet velvet, her hair was hyacinth-
hued,

And her ankles—no matter. A face where the music
of every mood

Was touched by the tremulous fingers of passionate
feeling, and made

Strange melodies, scornful, but sweeter than strings
whereon sorrow has played

To enrapture the hearing of mirth when his garland of
blossom and green

Turns to lead on the anguished forehead—‘you don’t
understand what I mean’?

Well, of course I knew you were stupid—you always
were stupid at school—

Now don’t say you weren’t—but I’m hanged if I thought
you were quite such a fool !

You don't see the point of all this? I was talking of
sickness and death—

In that poem I made years ago, I said this—'Love, the
flower-time whose breath

Smells sweet through a summer of kisses and perfumes
an autumn of tears

Is sadder at root than a winter—its hopes heavy-hearted
like fears.

Though I love your Grace more than I love little Letty,
the maid of the mill,

Yet the heat of your lips when I kiss them' (you see we
were intimate, Bill)

'And the beat of the delicate blood in your eyelids of
azure and white

Leave the taste of the grave in my mouth and the
shadow of death on my sight.

Fill the cup—twine the chaplet—come into the garden—
get out of the house—

Drink to *me* with your eyes—there's a banquet behind,
where worms only carouse !

As I said to sweet Katie, who lived by the brook on the
land Philip farmed—

Worms shall graze where my kisses found pasture !'

The Duchess, I may say, was charmed.

It was read to the Duke, and he cried like a child. If
you'll give me a pill,

I'll go on till past midnight. That poem was said to be
—Somebody's, Bill.

But you see you can always be sure of my hand as the
mother that bore me

By the fact that I never write verse which has never
been written before me.

Other poets—I blush for them, Bill—may'adore and
repudiate in turn a

Libitina, perhaps, or Pandemos ; my Venus, you know,
is Laverna.

Nay, that epic of mine which begins from foundations
the Bible is built on—

'Of man's *first* disobedience'—I've heard it attributed,
dammy, to Milton.

Well, it's lucky for them that it's not worth my while, as
I may say, to break spears

With the hirelings, forsooth, of the press who assert that
Othello was Shakespeare's.

When he that can run, sir, may read—if he borrows the
book, or goes on tick—

In my poems the bit that describes how the Hellespont
joins the Propontic.

There are men, I believe, who will tell you that Gray
wrote the whole of The Bard—

Or that I didn't write half the Elegy, Bill, in a Country
Churchyard.

When you know that my poem, The Poet, begins—
'Ruin seize thee !' and ends

With recapitulations of horrors the poet invokes on his
friends.

And I'll swear, if you look at the dirge on my relatives
under the turf, you

Will perceive it winds up with some lines on myself—
and begins with the curfew.

Now you'll grant it's more probable, Bill—as a man of
the world, if you please—

That all these should have prigged from myself than that
I should have prigged from all these.

I could cry when I think of it, friend, if such tears would
comport with my dignity,

That the author of *Christabel* ever should smart from
such vulgar malignity.

(You remember perhaps that was one of the first little
things that I carolled

After finishing *Marmion*, the *Princess*, the *Song of the
Shirt*, and *Childe Harold*.)

Oh, doubtless it always has been so—Ah, doubtless it
always will be—

There are men who would say that myself is a different
person from me.

Better the porridge of patience a poor man snuffs in his
plate

Than the water of poisonous laurels distilled by the
fingers of hate.

'Tis a dark-purple sort of a moonlighted kind of a mid-
night, I know ;

You remember those verses I wrote on Irene, from
Edgar A. Poe ?

It was Lady Aholibah Levison, daughter of old Lord
St. Giles,

Who inspired those delectable strains, and rewarded her
bard with her smiles.

I recited her charms, in conjunction with those of a girl
at the *café*,

In a poem I published in collaboration with Templeton
(Taffy).

There are prudes in a world full of envy—and some of
them thought it too strong

To compare an earl's daughter by name with a girl at a
French *restaurant*.

I regarded her, though, with the chivalrous eyes of a
knight-errant on quest ;

I may say I don't know that I ever felt 'prouder, old
friend, of a conquest.

And when I've been made happy, I never have cared a
brass farthing who knew it ; I

Thank my stars I'm as free from mock-modesty, friend,
as from vulgar fatuity.

You may see by my shortness of speech that my time's
almost up : I perceive

That my new-fangled brevity strikes you : but don't—
though the public will—grieve.

As it's sometimes my whim to be vulgar, it's sometimes
my whim to be brief ;

As when once I observed, after Heine, that 'she was a
harlot, and I' (which is true) 'was a thief.'

(Though you hardly should cite this particular line, by
the way, as an instance of absolute brevity :

I'm aware, man, of that ; so you needn't disgrace yourself,
sir, by such grossly mistimed and impertinent levity.)

I don't like to break off, any more than you wish me to
stop : but my fate is

Not to write half a million such rhymes without block-
heads exclaiming—

JAM SATIS.

SONNET FOR A PICTURE

SONNET FOR A PICTURE.

THAT nose is out of drawing. With a gasp,
She pants upon the passionate lips that ache
With the red drain of her own mouth, and make
A monochord of colour. Like an asp;
One lithe lock wriggles in his rutilant grasp.
Her bosom is an oven of myrrh, to bake
Love's white warm shewbread to a browner cake.
The lock his fingers clench has burst its hasp.

The legs are absolutely abominable.

Ah ! what keen overgust of wild-eyed woes

Flags in that bosom, flushes in that nose ?

Nay ! Death sets riddles for desire to spell,

Responsive. What red hem earth's passion sews,

But may be ravenously unripped in hell ?

NEPHELIDIA

NEPHELIDIA.

FROM the depth of the dreamy decline of the dawn
through a notable nimbus of nebulous noonshine,
Pallid and pink as the palm of the flag-flower that
flickers with fear of the flies as they float,
Are they looks of our lovers that lustrously lean from a
marvel of mystic miraculous moonshine,
These that we feel in the blood of our blushes that
thicken and threaten with throbs through the throat?

Thicken and thrill as a theatre thronged at appeal of an
actor's appalled agitation,
Fainter with fear of the fires of the future than pale
with the promise of pride in the past ;
Flushed with the famishing fullness of fever that reddens
with radiance of rathe recreation,
Gaunt as the ghastliest of glimpses that gleam through
the gloom of the gloaming when ghosts go aghast ?
Nay, for the nick of the tick of the time is a tremu-
lous touch on the temples of terror,
Strained as the sinews yet strenuous with strife of
the dead who is dumb as the dust-heaps of death :
Surely no soul is it, sweet as the spasm of erotic emo-
tional exquisite error,
Bathed in the balms of beatified bliss, beatific itself by
beatitude's breath.

Surely no spirit or sense of a soul that was soft to the
spirit and soul of our senses

Sweetens the stress of suspiring suspicion that sobs in
the semblance and sound of a sigh ;

Only this oracle opens Olympian, in mystical moods and
triangular tenses—

‘ Life is the lust of a lamp for the light that is dark till
the dawn of the day when we die.’

Mild is the mirk and monotonous music of memory,
melodiously mute as it may be,

While the hope in the heart of a hero is bruised by the
breach of men’s rapiers, resigned to the rod ;

Made meek as a mother whose bosom-beats bound with
the bliss-bringing bulk of a balm-breathing baby,

As they grope through the grave-yard of creeds, under
skies growing green at a groan for the grimness of God.

Blank is the book of his bounty beholden of old, and its
binding is blacker than bluer :

Out of blue into black is the scheme of the skies, and
their dews are the wine of the bloodshed of things ;
Till the darkling desire of delight shall be free as a fawn
that is freed from the fangs that pursue her,
Till the heart-beats of hell shall be hushed by a hymn
from the hunt that has harried the kennel of kings.

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